

Benedict Arnold

By Jane Runyon

Benedict Arnold was a very **complex** man. He was the fifth generation of his family to be born on American soil. His family had struggled for religious freedom in the colonies. They worked and prospered in Rhode Island. Yet, when you read stories about Arnold, he is not celebrated as an outstanding American.

Benedict Arnold began life in Connecticut in 1741. As a young man he was known for his physical strength and his very good looks. Unfortunately, he had the habit of reacting to some situations instead of thinking first. He had some very good qualities, but he also had some very bad characteristics. He ran away from home when he was only fifteen years old. He joined the army of Connecticut and started fighting the French at Albany and Lake George. He soon got tired of being ordered around by the officers and **deserted**. He decided home was better than the army.

He got a job in a drug store in Norwich. A few years later he moved to New Haven and started his own drug store. He was very successful in business and soon became one of the town's most prosperous citizens. In 1767, he married Margaret Mansfield. They had three sons. Margaret died just eight years after her marriage leaving her husband to raise their children.

When news of the battle of Lexington reached New Haven on April 20, Benedict Arnold called the men of his town together. He had become a captain in the governor's guards and was the leader of sixty men. Arnold wanted to lead his men immediately to Boston. The town leaders wanted to wait for formal orders before they did anything. When the leaders refused Arnold the ammunition he needed for his men, Arnold threatened to break into the **magazine** where the weapons and ammunition were kept. He quickly got his way.

When Arnold and his men reached Cambridge, Massachusetts, he suggested that the combined forces take over Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point. His plan was accepted, and he and 400 men set off for the western portion of New York. As luck would have it, Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys had had the same idea. When Arnold arrived and tried to take command, he was told to join the forces, not lead them.

In July, Arnold was placed in command of 1,100 men for a campaign against the British at Quebec. It was a dangerous plan, but Arnold had everything under control until one of his officers deserted him and took 200 men with him. Two hundred other men had died from the hardships of the march. That left Arnold's army too small to do the job. In December, his troops were joined by those of General Montgomery. Arnold was able to keep Quebec under **siege** until April. At that time, the British troops received reinforcements and were able to drive the Americans from Canada.

Benedict Arnold was not an easy man to get along with. He made many enemies among his own men during his campaigns. Charges were brought against him, and an investigation of his actions was called. Although he was cleared of any wrongdoing, his enemy list grew. He was a friend to George Washington. Not everyone thought that Washington was the right man to lead the country. Those opposed to him decided to insult the men loyal to Washington in a plan to get him to leave the service. Arnold felt like he was being picked on. In February of 1777, a promotion list for major-general was presented. Arnold's name was not on it. He had been overlooked for promotion.

In April of 1777, Arnold and several hundred militia were involved in a skirmish with 2,000 British soldiers in Danbury, Connecticut. He and his men fought bravely. His promotion was still not granted.

September of 1777 brought the battles at Saratoga. Benedict Arnold did not like, nor did he get along with General Gates, the American leader. He decided he was going to go back to Philadelphia, but he was talked into staying by the men who had no confidence in Gates. During the decisive battle at Saratoga, Gates refused to



Name _____



Date _____

reinforce Arnold and his men. Arnold took it upon himself to order his men to storm the British lines. It was a great victory for the Americans. It was an embarrassing moment for General Gates who didn't even take part in the battle. Arnold was wounded in the battle. He was not able to take part in the war until the following spring. He did, however, finally receive his promotion.

It was during this time that he met and fell in love with Margaret Shippen. Her father was a Tory, loyal to the British cause. For the next two years, Arnold became involved with Margaret's family and friends, all loyal to the British. He spent money lavishly and fell into debt. He decided to resign his commission as an American officer and settle down in New York. Arnold's enemies caught up with him. He was accused by members of the New York legislature of acts which would normally have been overlooked. But Arnold's enemies would use any means possible to **demean** him. The charges were proven false, but Arnold was given a mandatory, but slight, reprimand by Washington. Washington did not believe the charges. He even offered Arnold a job as second in command of the northern army during the next campaign.

Arnold had had enough. Hopes for the colonists' cause did not look good. Arnold let himself be convinced that the Americans were going to lose. He decided that he, alone, could restore the colonies to British rule. He asked for and received command of West Point in New York. His plan was to surrender the fort to the British. His plan was discovered. Arnold was forced to flee in disgrace. He and his wife, Margaret, fled to London in 1782 where the British welcomed him as a hero. He died at his home in London in 1801. He was branded a traitor to his country.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Benedict Arnold was the first in his family to be born on American soil.
- A. False
 - B. True
- _____ 2. How did Benedict Arnold show how he felt about the army at an early age?
- A. He deserted.
 - B. He enlisted twice.
 - C. He fought bravely.
 - D. He got promoted.
3. What was unusual about Arnold's trip to Boston after the Battle of Lexington?
- _____
- _____
- _____ 4. Who led the battle at Fort Ticonderoga?
- A. Ethan Allen
 - B. George Washington
 - C. General Gates
 - D. Benedict Arnold

Name _____



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5. The story states that Benedict Arnold had some "good qualities and some bad characteristics." What were some of these good and bad qualities?

- _____ 6. What were people loyal to the British called?

- A. Republicans
- B. Patriots
- C. Whigs
- D. Tories

- _____ 7. Where did Arnold plan to surrender?

- A. Saratoga
- B. West Point
- C. Ticonderoga
- D. Boston

8. Why did the British treat Arnold like a hero?

What does the word "infamous mean"? What might someone do to become infamous?



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